NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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RON PEMSTEIN/BELGRADE

BULGARIA, YUGOSLAVIA AND THE MACEDONIANS

ANNCR:

ON MARCH THIRD, BULGARIA WILL MARK THE ONE-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS INDEPENDENCE. WHILE THE OCCASION IS ONE OF CELEBRATION IN SOFIA, ITS BEEN MARKED BY SHARP POLEMICS IN YUGOSLAVIA. RON PEMSTEIN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM BELGRADE.

VOICE:

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, RUSSIAN ARMIES ELIMINATED TURKISH RULE IN BULGARIA. THE RESULTING TREATY OF SAN STEFANO CREATED AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY AND THE RUSSIAN ASSISTANCE WAS NEVER FORGOTTEN.

THIS IS ONE REASON WHY THE SOVIET INFLUENCE OVER MODERN BULGARIA DOES NOT STIR THE UNDERCURRENT OF RESENTMENT THAT CAN BE FELT, FOR EXAMPLE, IN POLAND OR HUNGARY OR CZECHOSLOVAKIA. INDEED, BULGARIAN DIPLOMATS ARE PROUD TO SAY THEIR FOREIGN POLICY IS IDENTICAL TO THAT OF MOSCOW.

BUT HERE IN YUGOSLAVIA, SOVIET INFLUENCE OVER BULGARIAN POLICY IS CONSIDERED TO BE BEHIND BELGRADE'S DISPUTE WITH SOFIA OVER THE MACEDONIAN NATIONALITY.

THE NATIONALITY DISPUTE IS ALSO A PRODUCT OF THE TREATY OF SAN STEFANO. THE TREATY GAVE BULGARIA WIDER BORDERS THAN IT HAS TODAY, INCLUDING MOST OF THE MACEDONIAN REPUBLIC IN PRESENT-DAY YUGOSLAVIA.

THREE MONTHS AFTER THE TREATY, THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN REMOVED THE MACEDONIAN AREA FROM BULGARIAN CONTROL. BUT DURING WORLD WAR TWO, BULGARIA ALLIED ITSELF WITH NAZI GERMANY AND OCCUPIED YUGOSLAV MACEDONIA UNTIL ALMOST THE END OF THE WAR.

THE FEAR THAT SOFIA STILL THINKS ABOUT A "GREATER BULGARIA" THAT WOULD INCLUDE YUGOSLAV MACEDONIA MOTIVATES YUGOSLAVIA TO SHARP PRESS ATTACKS. OBSCURE BULGARIAN HISTORICAL JOURNALS ARE QUOTED IN THE YUGOSLAV PRESS CLAIMING THAT THE SAN STEFANO TREATY ENSURED THE UNIFICATION OF BULGARIA WITHIN ITS PROPER ETHNIC BOUNDARIES.

THE YUGOSLAV NEWS AGENCY, TANJUG, QUOTES AN UNNAMED BULGARIAN HISTORIAN AS CONTENDING THAT THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN -- WHICH REDUCED BULGARIA TO ITS CURRENT BORDERS -- WAS A TRAGIC AMPUTATION OF THE COUNTRY.

THIS GETS INTO ANOTHER RELATED ISSUE, THE MACEDONIAN POPULATION OF THE TWO COUNTRIES.
YUGOSLAVIA INSISTS THAT MACEDONIANS ARE A SEPARATE SLAV PEOPLE WITH THEIR OWN LANGUAGE AND RELIGION. MACEDONIANS HAVE THEIR OWN REPUBLIC WITHIN YUGOSLAVIA. BULGARIA CLAIMS THAT MACEDONIANS ARE RACIALLY BULGARIANS AND IT REFUSES TO RECOGNIZE THEM AS A SEPARATE PEOPLE. IN THE LAST BULGARIAN CENSUS, THERE WAS NO CATEGORY FOR MACEDONIANS ALTHOUGH SOME TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND WERE REGISTERED IN 1956.

ALTHOUGH BULGARIA HAS TRIED TO TREAT THE ISSUE AS ONE ON WHICH THE TWO COUNTRIES CAN AGREE TO DISAGREE, YUGOSLAVIA INSISTS RELATIONS CANNOT IMPROVE UNTIL BULGARIA RECOGNIZES THE MACEDONIAN NATIONALITY.

THE DISPUTE IS NOT JUST HISTORICAL OR IDEOLOGICAL. SO MINOR AGREEMENTS ARE CONCLUDED AND LOWER-RANKING OFFICIALS EXCHANGE VISITS. BUT AS BULGARIA CELEBRATES IT INDEPENDENCE, YUGOSLAVIA IS USING THE OCCASION TO DEMONSTRATE HOW BAD RELATIONS ARE.

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WJL/RTD